

Inside Region 3

Vol. 4, No. 3 December 2001



Prescribed Fire
**Unseasonably Mild Weather
Extends Fall Burning Season**



This "Terra-Torch" is used to cross water barriers such as ditches. It also enables fire crews to work without having to wade in marsh muck.

Agassiz NWR Burns

Nearly 5,000 Acres

Despite receiving eight inches of snow in the area October 24, the staff at Agassiz National Wildlife Refuge in northwest Minnesota were able to treat six units of refuge with prescribed fire between Oct.1 and Nov.19, 2001. More than 4,860 acres on the Goose Pen (520 acres), Pool 8 (200 acres), Parker Pool (2,240), Headquarters Pool (1,560 acres) and Golden Valley (160 acres) units were burned.

Prescribed fires are used by resource managers to control the spread of exotic plant species and improve wildlife habitat. Prescribed fires are more difficult to conduct in the fall due to reduced daylight hours available for burnings. The start of the state's deer hunting season also interrupted burns on the refuge for nine days. Despite the set backs, the ability to conduct burning in mid-November in this area is a rare gift from Mother Nature.

All burning operations at Agassiz NWR require a minimum of seven qualified people. In addition to refuge staff, personnel from other Service offices and partners helped conduct the burns. Participants included Steve Schumacker, Dave Davis and Ryan and Pat Wagner from Detroit Lakes Wetland Management District; John Braastad, Thief River Falls Private Lands; Tom Franklin, Tamarac NWR; Dan Angelo, Union Slough NWR and two members of the Red Lake Band of Chippewa. *Margaret Anderson, Agassiz NWR*

Photos by Maggie Anderson



This aerial view of Parker Unit at Agassiz NWR was taken four days after the start of prescribed burning. Of the unit's 3,200 acres, 2,400 are burned; 800 are water or wet marsh.



Refuge Operations Specialist Dave Bennett (right) uses a drip torch to burn an area around phone box to protect it from larger fires. Both men were safe on County Road 7.



--USFWS Photo

Nearly invisible against a backdrop of flames, a District fire crew member extinguishes a smoldering fire on an adjacent field.

Snow Ends Fall Prescribed Fire Season at Fergus Falls WMD

The successful fall prescribed fire season at Fergus Falls Wetland Management District (WMD) came to a halt in late November due to a blizzard that blanketed much of western and northwestern Minnesota.

Unseasonably warm weather throughout November allowed fire crews to conduct burns through Nov. 20. This fall, District fire crews completed 15 burns totaling 1,120 acres, had two wildfires totaling 1 acre, and assisted the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources with one fire totaling 320 acres. During Calendar Year 2001, 47 prescribed fires were conducted on a total of 4,358 acres. (40 burns of 3,790 acres during Fiscal Year 2001. Between Oct. 1 and Nov. 27, 12 controlled burns have been conducted on 1,011 acres.)

The warm, dry weather resulted in many hot fires well into November. District staff were able to kill large numbers of trees on units where trees were invading the prairie. District fire crews also completed some much needed burns at the Prairie Wetlands Learning Center (PWLC), especially around the buildings. Three sites were burned to stimulate flea beetles released to control leafy spurge. Three

sites were burned as part of the site preparation for native grass seeding. Crews burned inside three predator fences to stimulate nesting cover, and

the rest of the burns were executed to reduce the duff layer and stimulate nesting cover. *Kevin Brennan, Fergus Falls Wetland Management District*

874 Acres Burned at Minnesota Valley NWR

In September, staff at Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge burned 874 acres in 19 controlled burns. This year's priority was oak savannah and native prairie restoration. Several small goat prairies on the bluffs of the Minnesota River were burned to rejuvenate these rare native habitats. The Louisville oak savannah restoration area was also burned this spring. Over the past seven

years, the Refuge has hydro-axed over 60 acres of this 200 acre oak savannah to remove unwanted trees that grew following the suppression of fire for farmland and pasture. The Refuge also maintains fire monitoring plots there. The Minnesota Conservation Corps assisted Refuge staff with prescribed fires and firebreak maintenance. *Tom Kerr, Minnesota Valley NWR*

Windom WMD Conducts Its First Prescribed Fire

The Windom Wetland Management District (WMD) conducted its first fall burns since being established in 1990. Four burns totaling 169.6 acres were completed in late September on waterfowl production areas (WPA) in Jackson County.

Prescribed fires on Boot Lake and Skunk Lake WPAs will stress the cool season brome grass and provide a clean field effective herbicide treatment of the brome prior to seeding. The sites will be

converted from introduced cool season grasses to warm season grasses of local origin. Portions of the unit were dominated by brome grass, a sod forming grass which crowds out other plant species leading to a mono-typical stand of brome. This species provides little benefit to wildlife species.

The Timber Lake burn reduced the invasion of woody vegetation into the seeded native prairie and wetland basin. *Todd Hauge, Windom WMD*

Three Michigan Men Indicted For Illegal Trade in Protected Cats

10-Count Indictment is Third Phase of Charges Issued After Lengthy Undercover Investigation

A federal court in Detroit, Mich., unsealed a 10-count indictment Nov. 27, 2001, charging three Michigan men with illegally purchasing hides of federally-endangered tigers and leopards. The indictment was returned May 15, 2001, in the Eastern District of Michigan in Detroit following a lengthy undercover investigation by agents of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

The indictments charge George F. Riley, 69, of Farmington Hills, Mich., with three felony violations of the Lacey Act, and two misdemeanor violations of the Endangered Species Act in connection with his purchase of two tiger hides and one black leopard hide. Leonard A. Kruszewski, 40, of Milford, Mich., was charged with two felony violations of the Lacey Act and one misdemeanor violation of the Endangered Species Act in connection with his purchase of a tiger

hide. William Donald Foshee, 43, of Jackson, Mich., was charged with one felony violation of the Lacey Act and one misdemeanor violation of the Endangered Species Act for his purchase of a leopard hide.

Service investigators, working closely with the U.S. Attorney's Offices in Missouri, Illinois and Michigan, uncovered a group of residents and small business owners in the Midwest that allegedly bought and killed exotic tigers, leopards, snow leopards, lions, mountain lions, cougars, mixed breed cats and black bears with the intention of introducing meat and skins into the lucrative animal parts trade. The three Michigan men were not charged with killing any of the animals.

The three men charged in Michigan are the third phase of federal indictments to be brought in the ongoing investiga-

tion. On Nov. 8, 2001, federal conspiracy and Lacey Act charges were filed against Todd and Vicki Lantz, of Cape Girardeau, Mo., Freddy Wilmoth of Gentry, Ark., Stoney Elam of Fort Gibson, Okla., and Tim Rivers of Citra, Fla.. The five are alleged to have illegally purchased, transported and sold federally-endangered tigers and leopards between January and August 1998.

In January, Woody Thompson, Jr. of Three Rivers, Mich., pleaded guilty in U.S. District Court in Grand Rapids, Mich., to brokering the interstate sale of three tiger skins. Thompson, owner of the Willow Lake Sportsman's Club in Three Rivers, was sentenced to serve six months home detention and two years probation; fined \$2,000 and ordered to pay \$28,000 to the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation's "Save the Tigers Fund." *Scott Flaherty, External Affairs*

Service Halts Work on Proposed South Fox Island Land Exchange

The Service announced Dec. 4, it will discontinue work to develop an Environmental Impact Statement that was to examine the impacts of a proposed land exchange between the State of Michigan and a private landowner on South Fox Island in Leelanau County, Michigan. The action came after the Service and the National Park Service received a request from the State of Michigan asking to halt development of the EIS. The three agencies had been cooperating in the effort.

The Michigan Department of Natural Resources made its request after the private landowner involved in the proposed exchange decided to reduce the scope of the land exchange on South Fox Island. Because the landowner's revised proposal includes 218 acres of lands with no federal interests, the federal process under which an EIS is developed is no longer applicable.

The EIS was to evaluate a proposed exchange of state land, acquired with Federal Aid wildlife restoration program funds, for privately owned land of equal value; exchange of state lands with



--Photo courtesy Michigan DNR

South Fox Island.

National Park Service interest for privately owned lands; and exchange of state lands for lands currently under private ownership on South Fox Island.

Because the actions being considered by the EIS were initiated at the request of the Michigan Department of Natural Resources, the two federal agencies will honor the request to discontinue efforts to develop the EIS. Any proposed exchange of land with the Service or the National Park Service is discontinued. Any future

consideration of a similar land exchange involving lands with federal interests will be considered a new action requiring a separate review under the National Environmental Policy Act. This federal law requires analysis of environmental impacts and can result in the development of an Environmental Assessment or an Environmental Impact Statement depending on the nature of the action. *Georgia Parham, External Affairs*

Service Works to Protect Wetlands at Train Derailment Site in Michigan

Lisa Williams of the East Lansing Field Office's Contaminants Branch is assisting the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency oversee the remediation at the site of a freight train derailment near Andersonville, Mich. Nov. 15. The derailed locomotives spilled 3,000 - 4,000 gallons of diesel fuel and petroleum lubricants into the railroad right-of-way and adjacent wetlands.

The impacted wetlands are a one-to-two acre mix of open-water, sedge-dominated, and wooded wetlands that are part of Huron Swamp, the headwaters of the Huron River. The wetlands are owned by the Michigan Nature Association (MNA). Williams has been

working with MNA, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), and the railroad to optimize the remedial activities for contaminant removal in the impacted area while protecting immediately adjacent vegetation, soil and water and planning for recovery of the habitat.

Based on MNA's concerns over preserving local strains of native vegetation, the area will not be replanted and all temporary soil stabilization has been done with silt fences, geotextile fabric, and stone rather than mulching and seeding. In addition, the railroad is drafting a monitoring plan for the impacted area to insure that non-native or invasive species do not

become established in the area while it re-vegetates. While assisting EPA, Williams will review and approve the monitoring plan and oversee its implementation over the next five years.

The area of wetland directly impacted is between one and two acres because of containment and recovery efforts that included absorbent booms, a temporary clay berm, silt curtains, vacuuming and excavation. Without prompt remediation, the area potentially impacted included hundreds of acres of the Huron Swamp, headwaters of the Huron River in Oakland County, Mich.. *Lisa Williams, East Lansing Field Office*

Agassiz Refuge's Slumping Parker Dike Gets Needed Facelift

A two mile stretch of the north boundary of Parker Dike on Ditch 11 at Agassiz National Wildlife Refuge has suffered severe slumping (14 locations) over the past 10 years, threatening the integrity of the dike in Parker Pool. The dike was in such bad shape that it was closed to vehicle traffic.

This summer, a contract was awarded to Spruce Valley Corporation, Middle River, Minn., to make desperately needed repairs to seven of the slumps. Work began on Sept. 12, 2001, and was completed Nov. 16.

Although half of the slumps have been repair, seven more existing slumps remain in the 11,800 foot dike. The dike has held up considerably well considering it first built in the early 1900s, last worked on during the days of the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), and has suffered years' worth of severe flooding.

Engineer Craig Swedenborg from the Regional Office at Fort Snelling oversaw survey and contract design. Contracting Specialist Scott Halstead, administered the contract on this MMS project. Dave Bennett, refuge operations specialist at Agassiz, was the daily field inspector.

Margaret Anderson, Agassiz NWR



--Photo by Maggie Anderson
Refuge staffer Dave Bennett stands inside one of the eroding slumps along Parker dike.

Ashland FRO Assists With Native American Conservation and Restoration Projects

The Service's Ashland Fishery Resources Office (FRO) provides technical assistance on fish and wildlife matters to 14 Native American tribes and associated conservation programs in Michigan, Minnesota and Wisconsin. Yearly contact is made with natural resource directors in order to assess wildlife technical and financial assistance needs. Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program information was specifically provided this year. We also provide project assistance to additional tribes throughout the upper Midwest where needed.

Presently, Ashland FRO is providing financial and technical wildlife habitat assistance to four tribal wetland projects; Lac du Flambeau (195 acres), Grand Portage (45 acres), Menominee (15 acres) and Great Lakes Indian Fish and Wildlife Commission, or GLIFWC, (15 acres).

One tribal wetland/riparian project was completed this year, GLIFWC's 75-acre-1 mile riparian Spring Creek project. Wetland restoration technical assistance is also being provided to the Red Cliff tribe in regards to beaver pond and ephemeral wetland restoration. Prairie restoration technical assistance was provided to the Prairie Island Indian Community. Planning is presently underway for a 100-acre prairie restoration cooperative project involving the Service, Prairie Island Indian Community and Circle of Flight.

In the past few years, Ashland FRO has completed upland and wetland restoration projects with the Oneida Tribe of Wisconsin, Leach Lake Reservation, Fond du Lac, White Earth, Red Cliff, Grand Portage, and Lac du Flambeau. *Ted Koehler, Ashland FRO*

National Fish and Wildlife Foundation Grant Will Benefit Lake Sturgeon

Personnel from the Superior National Forest contacted the Ashland Fishery Resources Office in 1997 to request assistance in determining if adult lake sturgeon are still present in the Sturgeon River. Over the next two years, the Ashland FRO conducted spring gill netting surveys. Although small numbers of sturgeon were captured in the lower segments of the river, no sturgeon were seen within the upper portions despite the observations that suitable spawning habitat appears to be adequate. One of the assumptions made was that due to extensive logjams, the fish were just not able to migrate into the upper sections of the river.

Working with the Minnesota DNR, the Ashland FRO submitted a grant application through the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation requesting financial assistance to remove these log jams. Removal of these barriers could provide an additional 34.5 miles of potential spawning/nursery habitat. The grant has been approved (\$21,000) and now the log



--USFWS Photo

Lake Sturgeon will benefit from a recent grant that funds removal of log jams from sturgeon habitat on the Sturgeon River.

jam removal project can begin next year. Working with partners for the benefit of the resource can come together in many forms. Although the Ashland FRO will not be directly assisting with this project, the end result will be an improved fishery that will hopefully benefit future spawning populations of lake sturgeon. *Frank Stone, Ashland Fishery Resources Office*

Big Muddy Fish Roundup Saves Nearly 1,000 Sportfish

Service biologists from LaCrosse Fishery Resources Office (FRO) and Genoa National Fish Hatchery (NFH) in Wisconsin teamed up in early December to rescue and relocate nearly 1,000 fish that had been trapped in a hatchery pond since the spring.

Dave Wedan, Mark Steingraeber and Scott Yess from LaCrosse FRO joined Jeff Lockington from Genoa NFH for the operation. Several hundred northern pike (650) and approximately 300 fish of a variety of species including smallmouth bass, largemouth bass, bluegill, crappie and walleye were netted. The fish had entered a hatchery pond during heavy spring flooding. The pond was drained and the fish netted.

The northern pike will be stocked at Horicon NWR in southeast Wisconsin in support of the refuge's rough fish control effort. *Scott Yess, LaCrosse FRO*

Results of Sturgeon Study Presented at Midwest Fish and Wildlife Conference

Biologist Tracy Hill gave a presentation titled 'Age and Growth Characteristics of Lake Sturgeon Populations from Lake Huron and the St. Clair Waterway' during the Sturgeon, Paddlefish, Lake Trout and Cisco general session at the 63 Midwest Fish & Wildlife Conference Dec. 12 in Des Moines, Iowa. The symposium was an excellent opportunity for Hill to explain how the Alpena Fishery Resources Office (FRO) is working in cooperation with state, tribal and non-governmental partners to restore lake sturgeon populations to the Great Lakes.

Hill was also co-author on two other presentations given during the general session. The presentations were titled 'Ecology of Lake Sturgeon (*Acipenser fulvescens*) in the Detroit River' and 'Juvenile Lake Sturgeon Assessment in Western Lake Erie'. Central Michigan University Graduate student Nathan Caswell and Alpena FRO fishery biologist Emily Zollweg presented the talks. *Tracy Hill, Alpena FRO*

LaCrosse Fishery Resources Office Gets Grant for Fish Passage Project

The LaCrosse Fishery Resources Office (FRO) was recently awarded a \$65,000 grant which will be matched with funds and in kind services from partners to build a fish passage structure on the Wild Rice River near Twin Valley, Minnesota. Participates on this project include the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, White Earth Biology Department and the Wild Rice Watershed District.

The Wild Rice River is a major tributary to the Red River of the North which has numerous dams and barriers to fish migration. Such barriers limit fish movement to critical habitats and therefore reduce populations and diversity. One prime example is the lake sturgeon which once were abundant in the Red River Watershed now

have to be reintroduced. Surveys completed by both the Minnesota DNR and the White Earth Biology Department indicate the species diversity is greater below the Heiberg Dam with essentially no sport fish species collected above the dam. So providing fish passage will increase fish diversity and also increase the chance of success with the lake sturgeon reintroduction projects conducted by the Minnesota DNR, White Earth Biology Dept. and the Service.

When completes, the structure will allow fish to migrate past the Heiberg Dam and access more than 120 miles of the watershed. A boulder, stair-stepped rapids will create a water flow that fish will be able to negotiate. A similar structure was installed at a dam in Fargo, North

Dakota with success. The structure created a rapid type river flow that also provided a unique kayaking opportunity.

The Red River Watershed has numerous dams and fish barriers along its stretch which hinder fish migration resulting in reduced diversity and populations. It is the goal of several resource agencies to remove or alter as many of these barriers as possible.

This project will allow fish migration to over 120 miles of riverine habitats along the Wild Rice River watershed which is a major tributary to the Red River. It will not only increase species diversity but will have major benefits to lake sturgeon and sport fish populations. *Scott Yess, LaCrosse Fishery Resources Office*

Service Helping Red Lake Tribe's Walleye Restoration Effort

The Ashland Fishery Resources Office (FRO) is continuing to work with the Red Lake Band of Chippewa, Minnesota Department of Natural Resources and staff from the University of Minnesota to restore a naturally spawning population of walleye in Red Lake.

Frank Stone from the Ashland FRO met with the Red Lake Task Force Dec. 5 to discuss the 2002 walleye stocking program, performance indicators and law enforcement components of this long-term restoration effort. The Committee reconfirmed its desire to rehabilitate the walleye population in the Red Lake and to ensure that fish stocks are conserved for the cultural, recreational, social, and economic benefit of all.

The two previous walleye fry stockings have successfully recruited into this fishery. Fry stocking will not be conducted in 2002, due to a possible suppression

effect on the previous year classes. Fry stocking will most likely occur in 2003, and the Red Lake DNR may want to continue spring trawling efforts to assess forage fish abundance. The draft walleye recovery progress report will be mailed by January 31; the next meeting will be held on March 14.

The Minnesota DNR has changed its regulations for next spring that will make it illegal to "fish for walleye" within the Red Lakes

Historically, the Red Lakes have provided food, recreation, cultural pursuits, and income to many people. If this restoration effort succeeds, it may well be the single most successful natural resource event ever accomplished within the State of Minnesota. Government leadership, cooperation, and coordination have been paramount throughout this pro-

cess. All parties have demonstrated a willingness to lead by example to achieve the community support and involvement required to attain the goals of the Red Lake recovery effort.

If this restoration effort succeeds, it may well be the single most successful natural resource event ever accomplished within the State of Minnesota. Government leadership, cooperation, and coordination have been paramount throughout this process.

All parties have demonstrated a willingness to provide leadership by example to achieve the community support and involvement required to reach the goals of the Red Lake recovery effort. *Frank Stone, Ashland Fishery Resources Office*

Accomplishment Reports Received

The following accomplishment reports were processed by the Accomplishment Reporting System on Dec. 20, 2001. The reports listed have accomplishment dates between Nov. 15 and Dec. 19, 2001. All reports submitted to the ARS can be viewed by employees using the Report Manager utility on the ARS.

1. Grant From National Fish and Wildlife Foundation Benefits Lake Sturgeon.

Frank Stone, Ashland FRO

2. Ashland FRO Assists With Native American Conservation and Restoration Projects

Ted Koehler, Ashland FRO

3. Service Seeks to Protect Wetlands at Site of Train Derailment in Michigan

Lisa Williams, East Lansing FO

4. Study Results Presented at 63rd Midwest Fish and Wildlife Conference

Tracy Hill, Alpena FRO

5. Upper Great Lakes Fishery Office Participate in Lake Whitefish and Lake Trout Scale Aging Workshop

Glenn Miller, Ashland FRO

6. Partnership Begins Planning on St. Croix River Mussel Propagation Facility

Richard Rowse, Twin Cities FO

7. Follow Up Work for Coaster Brood Stock Development

Henry Quinlan, Ashland FRO

8. Another Edition of the MTAN Goes to Print

Frank Stone, Ashland FRO

9. Muscatatuck NWR Hosts Conservation Field Days

Donna Stanley, Muscatatuck NWR

10. Service Helping Red Lake Tribe's Walleye Restoration Effort

Frank Stone, Ashland FRO

11. Muscatatuck NWR Friends Groups Hosts Refuge Week Festival

Donna Stanley, Muscatatuck NWR

12. Big Muddy Fish Roundup

Scott Yess, LaCrosse FRO

13. Students Scrutinize PCB Cleanup Plan for Lower Fox River-Green Bay

Colette Charbonneau, Ecological Services

14. Alpena FRO Hosts Volunteer Appreciation Dinner

Emily Zollweg, Alpena FRO

15. Junior Duck in the News

Judith Miller, Minnesota Valley NWR

16. Land Preaquisitoin Contaminants Surveys - FWS Level I Procedures

Ted Koehler, Ashland FRO

17. Ohio Man Ordered to Pay More Than \$11,000.00 For Poisoning Federally Protected Migratory Birds

Paul Beiriger, Chicago LE

18. Muscatatuck NWR stronghold for Otters in Indiana reintroduction program

Susan Knowles, Muscatatuck NWR

19. A Snowy End to the Fall Prescribed Fire Season at Fergus Falls WMD

Kevin Brennan, Fergus Falls WMD/PWLC

20. LaCrosse FRO Receives Grant for Fish Passage Project

Scott Yess, LaCrosse FRO

21. Ashland FRO Contributes to Implementation of 2000 Consent Decree

Henry Quinlan, Ashland FRO

22. Careers Class at Fergus Falls High School

Kevin Brennan, Fergus Falls WMD/PWLC

23. Fergus Falls Kiwanis Club Learns about Refuge Law Enforcement

Kevin Brennan, Fergus Falls WMD/PWLC

24. Wetland Restorations on Ridgeway WPA and Jorgenson WPA

Kevin Brennan, Fergus Falls WMD/PWLC

25. Wetlands and Waterfowl Program

Kevin Brennan, Fergus Falls WMD/PWLC

26. Agassiz NWR Fall Burns Nearly 5,000 Acres

Margaret Anderson, Agassiz NWR

27. Parker Dike Rehabilitation - Agassiz NWR

Margaret Anderson, Agassiz NWR

28. Student Volunteer Investigating Lake Level Issue

Lisa Williams, East Lansing FO

29. Horicon NWR Completing Busy Fall Visitor Season

Molly Stoddard, Horicon NWR

30. Service and Corps of Engineers Present Draft Scope of Work

Dan Stinnett, Twin Cities Field Office

Inside Region 3



Inside Region 3 is produced by the External Affairs Office, Region 3, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Ft. Snelling, Minnesota. Items herein are selected from reports submitted from the field via the Accomplishment Reporting System. Photos in support of submissions are used by permission. Questions concerning *Inside Region 3*, or the Accomplishment Reporting System should be addressed to Scott Flaherty, 612-713-5309 or via email at: scott_flaherty@fws.gov

Equal opportunity to participate in, and benefit from programs and activities of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is available to all individuals regardless of physical or mental disability. For information please contact the U.S. Department of the Interior, Office for Equal Opportunity, 1849 C Street N.W., Washington, DC 20240. Federal Relay Number: 1-800-877-8339 TDD/TTY Available in alternative formats upon request.